



Mar. 26 / Administration of Ronald Reagan, 1967

Columbia, Missouri

*Remarks to a Sixth Grade Class at Fairview Elementary School. March 26, 1967*

*The President.* Well, I've enjoyed this. I wish it could go on longer. I hope that you all realize that you are part of a really exceptional school system. That's why we're here. The schools here in Columbia have achieved so much improvement over the years and such quality, that's why the Secretary and I and the others are all here.

But also in this civics class, and what you were doing—you know, it brings to mind about people like myself, like the Secretary and the people that you were talking about there in the Congress. [We don't really make the country great, you and Mrs. Hassemer, and you and your parents and the people of this country determine the quality of the country, because all of us work for you. We're the employees of the people of this country. And if the people of America are good, and they are, and they're patriotic, things will go right.]

Many years ago, in fact more than 100 years ago, when this brandnew country had suddenly achieved such stature and was so great and becoming powerful, a French writer came to this country. His name was de Tocqueville. He came because Europe was amazed. They wanted to find out: How did we do it? And he came and went all over America to meet the people and to look and to see, and went back and wrote a book about it. And he wrote one line in that book that was very wonderful in explaining things. [He said: "America is great because America is good. And if America ever stops being good, America will stop being great."]

And with all of this, and the checks and balances which you've been speaking about here today, the legislative, the executive branch, the judicial branch over all, to make sure we obey the law, all points up to the fact that, when we had our Revolution 200 years ago—there had been revolutions all over the world before and since. But most of those revolutions just changed one set of rulers for another set of rulers. Our Revolution was much deeper than that. We created something that had never before been done in the history of man. [We cre-

ated a government that was run by the people. And that's the difference between our Constitution and all those others.]

I've read an awful lot of constitutions. I've read the Soviet Constitution. It talks about right of assembly and freedom of speech and things of that kind. But what's the big difference, then, between theirs and ours? Well, all those other constitutions say we the government will allow you, the people, to do the following things. Our Constitution says we, the people, will allow the Government to do the following things, and the Government can't do anything that is not prescribed there in the Constitution.]

And that makes us so totally different from anyone else in the whole world. And pretty soon, you're going to be growing up and be in a new century, and you're going to be running the country. [And you don't have to hold public office to do that. You, the people, are in charge.]

I could go on here, but I know I shouldn't. Could I, just as a closing in here—since you were all being asked so many questions, I know I've only have time for one. We have to move on to some other classes.

Would someone like to ask—well, my partner here would.

*Student.* All this publicity and the press and stuff, they would scare me out of my mind. I just wonder what is it that made it worthwhile to you?

*The President.* That had made it so what? Q. Worthwhile to you.

*The President.* What had made it worthwhile? Well, this was one of the things why I asked for a commission to be appointed to bring out all the facts. You know, there was a revolution in a country called Iran, and the Ayatollah Khomeini took over and became the dictator of that country. Before that, it had a royal family, the Shah, the King. And he was thrown out of the country. But he had been—well, I knew him personally, and had met him and had been there in Iran. And he was doing what he thought was right for the people.

Then, this revolution decided that we, the United States, we were the Great Satan, we were the evil force. And yet, that's a very strategic country there in the Middle East, where there is so much trouble. And

yet, where so much trouble for the world can be caused. And we got word that some people there in the government would like to talk to us about maybe reestablishing a friendly relationship between the two countries.

Now, there is a terrorist group in another country, Lebanon, that we believe also sort of may not take orders exactly, but it gets its direction from the Ayatollah Khomeini's government. And they are holding some Americans as hostages. They've kidnaped them, and they're holding them there. They've had them there more than a year.

And we thought this was an opportunity—if we could establish a better relationship with these people in the Iranian Government who wanted to have a better relationship, or said they did. And, so, we sent some people over to start talking to them. And they wanted us to prove that we really were serious. And, so, they asked us to sell them some weapons. We hadn't been doing that because they're engaged in a war.

But these people said they were opposed to the war themselves, and they would like to see it ended. So we agreed, but on a basis that we said you can prove your qualifications as you're asking us to prove ours by seeing if you could get this terrorist group to free our hostages. And we would each do this for each other.

Well, this is what we started. And I'm afraid it wasn't carried out the way we had thought it would be. It sort of settled down to just trading arms for hostages, and that's a little like paying ransom to a kidnaper. If you do it, then the kidnaper's just encouraged to go kidnap someone else.

And finally, all of this came out into the open. Up until then, we'd had to keep everything very secret because we felt that the people who were talking to us from Iran would be executed by their government if they were found doing this. And it all came out in the public. I don't know what has happened to all those people there or not. And I have to say that I still think that the idea was right to try and establish a friendly relationship, try and bring about peace between the two countries that are at war, and try and get our people freed. But it kind of deteriorated into something else, and as I said the other

night on television, I won't make that mistake again.

Well, I know that I've talked too much here, and—

*Mrs. Hassemer.* Thank you for coming. We really appreciate it. I understand you need to get down to third grade.

*The President.* Yes.

*Mrs. Hassemer.* We do appreciate your coming today. Let's thank the President and Secretary Bennett for coming. *[Applause]*

*The President.* When you're studying these particular things, this particular course, remember how important it is. Because Thomas Jefferson—you all know who he was back in our history—Thomas Jefferson said: "If the people have all the facts and know the truth, the people will never make a mistake."

Thank you all very much.

*Note: The President spoke at 12:10 p.m. to Mrs. Elaine Hassemer's sixth grade class.*

*Prior to his remarks, the President and Secretary of Education William J. Bennett listened to a classroom discussion on the U.S. Constitution's separation of powers*